



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Family language policies in a multilingual world

**Citation for published version:**

Hancock, A 2017, 'Family language policies in a multilingual world: Opportunities, challenges and consequences', *Language and Intercultural Communication*, pp. 1-3.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2017.1366963>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/14708477.2017.1366963](https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2017.1366963)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Language and Intercultural Communication

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in Language and Intercultural Communication on 23/08/17, available online:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14708477.2017.1366963>

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



## BOOK REVIEW

**Family Language Policies in a Multilingual World: Opportunities, Challenges and Consequences**, edited by John Macalister and Seyed Hadi Mirvahedi, London, Routledge, 2017, Paperback ISBN 978-1-138-66607-8

*Family Language Policies in a Multilingual World: Opportunities, Challenges and Consequences* makes a valuable contribution to the developing field of family language policy (FLP). Based on Spolsky's (2004) seminal work on language policy, FLP involves the interwoven components of language practice (what people do with languages), language ideology (beliefs held about languages and language use) and language management (regulation and control of languages in the home).

The editors, John Macalister and Seyed Hadi Mirvahedi, state that the aim of the book is '*to reflect on how family language policies are constantly negotiated, contested, endorsed, and finally shaped by various factors, factors that are both external and internal to the domain of the home*' (p219). This aim is successfully achieved by providing readers with nine case studies to illuminate the dynamics of FLP within a wide range of multilingual polities.

The book is structured around three key themes, opportunities, challenges and consequences, as suggested in the collection's subtitle. Part 1, *Challenges*, consists of six chapters. The first chapter by Cassie Smith-Christmas explores the field of FLP broadly and points to new directions for research. The key theorists and researchers in the area of FLP are adequately referenced albeit Curdt-Christiansen's conceptualisation of FLP (2014: 37) could have been a helpful addition as it provides a visual representation of the multidimensional nature of FLP.

The following chapter by Rachel McKee and Kirsten Smiler looks at New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). Despite being one of New Zealand's official languages, the authors argue that a lack of institutional support for learning NZSL provides a disincentive to learn the language. The chapter effectively gets to grips with the complexities among the deaf community including the diversity of deaf and hearing parents, the intersection of NZSL and Māori agendas, technological advances and the politics of maintaining a deaf identity.

Most FLP studies tend to focus on the extent to which parents regulate their children's and their own language practices so it is very interesting to read the next chapter by Maureen Kendrick and Elizabeth Namazzi which challenges the

concept of ‘family’ and provides a fascinating glimpse into language practices among siblings in child-headed households in rural Uganda. The findings reveal the children’s home language (Luganda) is used for emotionally driven communication, such as retelling traditional folk tales, which serves as a bonding and coping mechanism among siblings in the absence of adult caregivers.

In contrast to many of the studies in the collection which employ ethnographically inclined small sample case studies, Seyed Hadi Mirvahedi uses a mixed method approach involving a quantitative attitude questionnaire administered to 107 families and a focus-group interview with six mothers to examine FLP among Azerbaijani-speaking families in Tabriz, Iran. The data sheds light specifically on how parents’ and children’s choices are shaped by the official language of the state (Farsi), educational policies and the media broadcast nationally and internationally. In a similar vein, Daisy Bernal Lorenzo’s chapter on the status of Zapotec, the indigenous language of the *Lozoga*’ migrants in Los Angeles, shows how FLP is transforming to the principal languages of the state, English and Spanish.

The final chapter in this section, by Diego Navarro and John Macalister, draws on interview data from a one-year longitudinal study of two lone-parents from the Colombian refugee community in Wellington, New Zealand and examines the children’s shift from Spanish to English as their dominant language.

Part 11, *Opportunities*, only consists of four chapters, which is perhaps a reflection of the challenges and dilemmas facing families with two or more competing languages, one of which is the language of education and upward social mobility. It begins with a chapter by Melanie Revis on the maintenance of the Amharic language within the Ethiopian refugee community in Wellington, New Zealand. Revis shines a light upon the crucial relationship between FLP and religious identification, whereby the values and beliefs of the Orthodox Church inculcates shared cultural, linguistic and religious practices in the home.

In the next chapter, Alison Crump takes an innovative approach to *generating data* (the author’s preferred term) by participating in dialogic play activities with children in three Japanese-Canadian families in Montreal, Quebec. This rich account sees children socialised in English and Japanese in the home as the parents follow a *one language one parent* (OLOP) policy. Furthermore, the children are also exposed to French through daycare and in public spaces, and Japanese at a Saturday heritage language school. Crump argues that the children’s immersion in multilingual worlds gives them an explicit awareness of the hierarchy of the different languages they use in their daily lives.

Corinne Seal's chapter takes a novel approach to collecting naturally-occurring speech with children in the home through the use of discreet wristwatches. The two émigré Eastern-European families collected the data themselves and the findings do not reveal any single FLP but rather dynamic language practices that depend on constantly changing needs of the conversationalists.

The final chapter in this section by Guangwei Hu and Li Ren, positions FLP in linguistically diverse Singapore. The authors uncover a range of factors impacting on language ideologies such as China's re-emerging position within global economics, multilingual state and educational policies, cultural norms and socioeconomic conditions. These all influence mother-child interaction strategies as parents regulate their children's and their own language practices.

Part 111 *Consequences*, comprises of only one chapter by the editors in which they analyse the studies in the collection as a confluence of discourses. The authors articulate FLP as an ecological language model where FLP is enacted in the home as a consequence of both societal and individual discourses. The chapter concludes with a consideration of educational and pedagogical implications to support successful language learning. In order to strengthen and expand the current thinking of FLP consideration could be given to children and young people's agency as they negotiate their diasporic identities with family members. Furthermore, some of the ethical quandaries and dilemmas about intrusion into participants' lives in the home is worthy of extended critical discussion.

The editors remind us that FLP does not take place in a vacuum but is shaped by both macro and micro forces and each chapter provides detailed historical and socio-political backgrounds to help the reader contextualize the research sites. It is pleasing to see a good mix of well-established scholars and recent PhD work represented in the volume as it gives support and space to emerging academics.

The book has its genesis in New Zealand and this is reflected in a number of chapters drawing on fieldwork conducted in New Zealand. However, it is also global in scope and investigates lesser-spoken languages and minoritised groups in locations new to the study of FLP. In an era of intense conflict, migration and globalization, the book serves as an excellent academic resource to stimulate thinking and has much to offer to the expanding discipline of FLP.

## References

Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2014) Family language policy: is learning Chinese at odds with learning English? In X. L. Curdt-Christiansen & A. Hancock

(Eds.), *Learning Chinese in diasporic communities: many pathways to be Chinese* (pp. 35-55). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.  
Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Andy Hancock  
*Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, UK.*  
*andy.hancock@ed.ac.uk*